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The Concept of the Flapper in the Early Writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald

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THE CONCEPT OF THE FLAPPER IN THE EARLY WRITINGS OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

BY

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser / Date

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

A curious, but important, relationship exists between the social history of a particular age and the imaginative literature of the same period. The writings in both areas become major sources of knowledge about that era for readers in future generations. Rightly or not, people often depend on literary works much more than they depend on serious historical accounts to give them the "picture of an age." Many a reader, for example, has become inspired to a general interest in Victorian English life after one good dose of Dickens. Likewise, many a student can acknowledge as introduction to the exciting cultural life in America during the Jazz Age the early short stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Although there may be divergences or contradictions, generally there are fundamental relationships between the leading fictional works and the histories of the twenties. These relationships have stimulated the interest of the present writer in exploring both fields and in sorting out the respective "elements of truth" in each one. The following thesis is the outgrowth, in part, of this interest--an examination of the concept of the flapper in the early works of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

For years Fitzgerald has been regarded as the chronicler of his Age. As early as 1920 he was heralded by the public as "Spokesman for the Younger Generation," and although he seems to

have been baffled at first by receiving this almost accidental distinction,[1] he soon accepted the appellation and even encouraged this image of himself.[2] Fitzgerald became an immediate success with the publication of his novel, This Side of Paradise in the spring of 1920; he was lionized by young people, "simply," he later reminisced, "for telling.../them/ that he felt as they did."[3] He was idolized especially by the flappers of the day[4] and was made very conscious of his influence in changing the behavior of fad-susceptible young women. (In later years, when Fitzgerald was once disgusted by seeing the aggressive, rude behavior of some young girls in Paris, he wrote regretfully to a friend, "If I had anything to do with creating the manners of the contemporary American girl, I certainly made a botch of the job.")[5]

The novelist's reputation as the historian of the Jazz Age has not only inspired the following study, but has determined its

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[1]Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. xvii.

[2]K.G.W. Cross, Scott Fitzgerald (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., 1964), p. 1.

[3]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions, 1956), p. 13.

[4]Irene Cleaton and Allen Cleaton, Books & Battles: American Literature, 1920-1930 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), p. 10.

[5]F. Scott Fitzgerald quoted in Alan Ross, "Rumble Among the Drums--F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and the Jazz Age," Horizon, XVIII (December, 1948), 421.

aims, as well. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the image of the flapper which Fitzgerald reveals in his early writings in its conformity to the popular image of the flapper in America during the 1920s. In achieving this goal, the present writer proposes (a) to analyze the popular concept of the flapper as it is described in the large-circulation periodicals and contemporary histories of the twenties; (b) to consider the actual girls in Fitzgerald's adolescent and young adult life as they relate to his fictional heroines; and (c) to define Fitzgerald's concept of the flapper as it is exemplified in the young heroines of his early novels and short stories.

The rationale behind the essay is that the study of the concept of the flapper, as exemplified in Fitzgerald's portraits, may provide a key to understanding young women in present-day America. Valid parallels can be drawn between the young women of the post-World War I era and those of the 1960s. The groups have felt similar dissatisfactions with the world of their parents' generation, and in searching for more satisfying life for themselves, they have exhibited a reckless enthusiasm for sometimes radical experimentation. Today's mini-skirted "mods" and "teenie-boppers"[6] have inherited much from the flappers, not the least of which is a rebellious instinct. Furthermore, present culture, like 1920s culture, has been influenced by "image-makers" who promote, often with great success, ideals in stylish appearance and behavior, and who thereby help to determine

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[6]For this term from current parlance I am indebted to "The New American Woman," Esquire, LXVII (February, 1967), 57.

the nation's cultural tastes.[7] And if one considers Fitzgerald as a leader of fashion who promoted, through his works of fiction, the flapper as an idealized stereotype of young womanhood in his society, one is more likely to recognize the ways in which personal taste can be directed through mass media in today's society. Just as the impact of the Beatles has extended far beyond the world of popular music (and has led trends in dress, manners, even language characteristics), so did Fitzgerald's influence have repercussions in non-literary aspects of his society.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, including the present introductory chapter. Chapter two places the flapper in a cultural setting and describes her as she was popularly characterized in America during the 1920s. It contains a discussion of the various societal conflicts that arose during the post-war decade between traditional conventions and new codes of behavior and that pertained especially to the "Younger Generation." Chapter three describes young Scott Fitzgerald during (and just before) the early 1920s, in order to suggest the author's relationship to his Age and to the concept of the flapper. Chapters four and five are devoted to analyses of Fitzgerald's flapper-type heroines. These heroines seem to fall

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[7]A recent example of image-making is the sudden arrival of a teen-aged model named "Twiggy" on the world fashion scene. Promoted by the Pygmalion who first helped to realize her potential beauty, she has become incredibly successful in a short time. The image she conveys, states Newsweek, "is youth and its moment is now." "Twiggy: Click! Click!," Newsweek, April 10, 1967, pp. 62-66.

into two sub-groups which reveal the complementary aspects of the Fitzgerald flapper. Fitzgerald primarily portrayed girls in his early novels and stories either (a) as they rose to the peak of their social success and popularity at about age nineteen, and/or (b) as they declined from that peak and, at age twenty-three or so, faced the problem of aging. Rosalind Connage, from This Side of Paradise, illustrates the heroines in the first sub-group, and is the focal point of the discussion in chapter four. Gloria Patch, from The Beautiful and Damned, personifies the girls in the second sub-group, and dominates the analysis in chapter five. Other heroines mentioned in the following pages are drawn principally from the short stories which Fitzgerald wrote from 1920 to 1924, and they are meant to supplement Rosalind and Gloria as interesting variations in characterization. They were selected as representative of the many young feminine characters Fitzgerald created during this period of his career.

Definition of Terms

The easy labels casually attached to the common features of daily life in our society are often extremely imprecise, and sometimes they lead merely to vague, idealistic images rather than to concrete, fully descriptive meanings. This being so, a writer faced with problems of formal definition must simply consider the most lucid interpretations available, and then attempt to adjust the most important facets of each alternative into a coherent description. The present writer, while trying to be inclusive, has attempted to do this,

and has assigned the definitions that sound most reasonable to such connotative terms as the "Jazz Age," the "Younger Generation," and the "Flapper."

The first two of these can be quickly, if somewhat arbitrarily, defined. The "Jazz Age" will be taken to mean the post-war decade, designated by Fitzgerald (who claims credit for inventing the term)[8] as the period which "began about the time of the May Day riots in 1919.../and/ leaped to its spectacular death in October, 1929."[9] The "Younger Generation" were the adolescents and young adults who ranged in age from twelve to thirty[10] during the post-war era, and who made themselves noticeable in American society by their tendency to revolt against the conventions of manner, dress and mores to which their parents and the adult community generally subscribed. Although the majority of young people in this age group seem to have been exposed to certain public notoriety and categorized as "flaming youth," many individual adolescents were undoubtedly non-rebellious. Fitzgerald's comment that it was this generation that "eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste,"[11] is significant, as is his further observation that it was this generation

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[8]Andrew Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 224.

[9]Fitzgerald, "Echoes...," Crack-Up, p. 13.

[10]Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 89.

[11]Fitzgerald, "Echoes...," Crack-Up, p. 15.

of girls "who dramatized themselves as flappers."[12] The idea of youthful self-dramatization gives a clue to the definition of the term flapper. For whatever else the word means, the term flapper seems to refer to a type of woman whose image young girls sought to imitate. It represented an ideal in appearance and manner. Specific definitions may be more technically or historically accurate, but the flapper, like her myth-siblings the Gibson Girl, the It-Girl, or today's Swinger, ultimately squirms from too exact a description.

Dictionaries, of course, provide short definitions, but even these include considerable variations. Webster's Second Edition (1959) names her colloquially as "a young girl of about fifteen to eighteen years of age, esp. one who is not yet 'out' socially;—probably so called with a double allusion, to 'flapper,' a young duck, and to the braid of hair worn hanging down the back of young girls. Webster's Third Edition (1961) suggests that she is "a young woman who aggressively manifests freedom from constraint and conventions in conduct and dress"; it also indicates that the term flapper was most often used "during the period of World War I and the following decade."

Longer descriptions of the flapper frequently refer to the young woman's appearance. As she was caricatured in the cartoons of John Held, Jr., the flapper had "stubby feet, incredibly long and brittle legs, brief and scanty skirt, two accurate circles of rouge

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[12] Ibid.

just below the cheek bones, and a tight little felt hat like an inverted tumbler"[13] covering her bobbed hair. If the ideal flapper looked something like this at the height of her career, then her younger sister, the "prep-school type"[14] flapper was less sophisticated, attired in middy blouse and galoshes.[15] Both girls probably conformed to the description in a 1922 issue of Atlantic Monthly of "Flapper Americana Novissima"--an independent young woman who delighted in dancing and popular music, who felt naïve pride in "free and easy manners," and who took unabashed pleasure in attracting the attention of boys.[16] Although several of her traits made her startlingly conspicuous in the twenties--her self-assured frankness in conversation, her daring enthusiasm for active participation in sports events,[17] and her occasional cigarette--the popular image of the flapper sounds not unlike the image of today's teenager or coed. Then as now, one suspects, there was often a healthy disparity between the glamorous image a girl cultivated and her individual reality.

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[13]Mark Sullivan, Our Times: The United States 1900-1925, Vol. III: The Twenties (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 33.

[14]"Flapping Not Repented Of," The Twenties: Fords, Flappers & Fanatics, ed. George E. Mowry (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 174.

[15]Marvin Barrett, The Jazz Age (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 47.

[16]G. Stanley Hall, "Flapper Americana Novissima," Atlantic Monthly, CXXIX (June, 1922), 772.

[17]"Flapping..., Mowry, p. 174.

Contemporary discussions of the twenties flapper sometimes include a reference to "Oscar Wilde's contention that nature imitates art far more than art imitates nature."[18] And the art which was held responsible for the flapper's existence in real life was Fitzgerald's early work. That Fitzgerald should have been held solely responsible for creating the flapper seems unsound, considering the many pressures that are always present in molding the appearance, manners and character of young ladies in any generation. Nevertheless, the author of This Side of Paradise is the one who gives today's society its portrait of this delightful, if unpredictable, creature.[19] It is interesting that Fitzgerald rarely uses the word flapper in his stories; instead he relies on terms that were probably even more au courant in 1920 than flapper, but which, consequently, sound even more dated today: "top girl," "speed," "deb," and "baby vamp." While distinctions in connotation certainly exist, they can, for the present, be considered synonymous.

Review of Pertinent Literature on the Topic

Since the early 1950s, there has been a gradual revival of interest in 1920s American life. Caused by several factors including the occurrence of a second post-war decade during the century, the revival has manifested itself in many ways. Autobiographies of people

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[18]Sullivan, p. 388.

[19]Frohock, W.M., "Morals, Manners, and Scott Fitzgerald," Southwest Review, XL (Summer, 1955), 227.

who enjoyed a youthful heyday in the twenties crowd bookstore shelves; newspapers and popular magazines offer articles on twenties life; television documentaries depict "the Lawless Decade," "the Era of Wonderful Nonsense." With this revived enthusiasm has come a new interest in America's exciting intellectual and literary life during that period.

E Scott Fitzgerald, among other novelists, has benefited from this new attention, for he has been the subject of increasing numbers of critical and biographical works and his novels and short stories have recently been reprinted in popular editions. One critic has suggested 1951 as "the peak year of the posthumous Fitzgerald boom,"[21] but it seems to this writer that 1961 dates more closely his height of popularity among both general readers and scholars. Although critical works to date have generally related Fitzgerald to the environment in which he wrote, and, in passing, have identified his adolescent characters as flappers, there have been no studies as yet devoted specifically to Fitzgerald's early heroines, or to their archetypal flapper qualities.

The historical surveys of the twenties are found in Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday and Mark Sullivan's volume The Twenties, in his series, Our Times. These provide a detailed view of the period

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[20]Paul Sann, The Lawless Decade A Pictorial History of A Great American Transition: From the World War I Armistice and Prohibition to Repeal and the New Deal (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), p.7.

[21]Cross, p. 113.

from the Armistice to the Great Crash. Various aspects of the intellectual history of the era are examined in Books & Battles by Irene and Allen Cleaton, Malcolm Cowley's Exile's Return, and most importantly, in Frederick Hoffman's excellent study, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade. Two helpful anthologies of essays and extracts from longer works pertaining to life in the twenties are The Twenties: Fords, Flappers & Fanatics, edited by George E. Mowry, and Fitzgerald and the Jazz Age, edited by Malcolm and Robert Cowley. Contemporary magazines of the twenties such as Smart Set, Delineator, and Collier's disclose the popular modes in dress and manners, but they are even more valuable for their discussions of the "Problem of the Younger Generation." It is in these journals that one finds the most detailed account of the flapper, as she was popularly conceived. Newspaper profiles of the period's celebrities, along with reviews and editorials on current happenings, indicate the temper of the times.

Fitzgerald's first two novels, This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned, and a selection of his short stories, most of them written between 1920 and 1924, provide the primary source material on his flapper characters. The author's published Letters and his essays in The Crack-Up are important in revealing his attitudes and feelings toward girls and women. Relevant details on Fitzgerald's life are taken from Arthur Mizener's outstanding work, The Far Side of Paradise and, to á lesser extent, from the biographies by Andrew Turnbull and Henry Dan Piper. Critical essays on the author,

especially those dealing with his attention to the manners and morals of his time, have been useful and were found in literary quarterlies and in such anthologies as Alfred Kazin's F. Scott Fitzgerald: the Man and his Work.

CHAPTER II

THE FLAPPER AS SOCIAL PHENOMENON OF THE TWENTIES

Culture in Transition

There were many factors that contributed to the shaping of American life in the twenties, but perhaps the most decisive one was the Great War. When it ended in 1918, its impact on the country's destiny had just begun. This modern Armageddon had brought great suffering to Americans, involving them in a catastrophe not of their own making. And if the war had not been sufficient cause for national dismay, its aftermath certainly was. The hopes culminating in the Armistice, that the world would indeed be made safe for democracy, were soon shattered, and the country knew a real disillusionment.

Tired of jaded international idealism and unsuccessful political reform, Americans shifted their attentions and eased into something called Normalcy. Feelings of dismay and tension would continue to be apparent in some measure throughout the decade, but these would gradually give way to attitudes of nonchalance and inclinations toward self-indulgence.[1] The historian Frederick Lewis Allen expressed the change as follows:

> Like an over-worked business man beginning his vacation, the country had had to go through a period of restlessness and irritability, but was finally learning how to relax and amuse itself once more.[2]

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[1]Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (New York: Bantem Books, 1959), p. 54.

[2]Ibid.

America was experiencing the first phase of a dramatic transition in its way of life. It was becoming a country whose business was business and whose interest was largely self-centered, a nation concerned more with domestic controversies like Prohibition than with international affairs. At the heart of this transition was a cultural chaos—a sense of restlessness and a disrespect for traditional authority. The chaos heralded further alterations in the social, economic and artistic spheres of national life, changes that would be both inherited by, and affected by, the Younger Generation.

Youth in Rebellion

When historians discuss the social issues of the twenties, they frequently mention the so-called Problem of the Younger Generation. Linked closely to the concept of a revolution in morals and manners, the "Problem" refers to the many varied demonstrations of boredom, frustration and rebellion that young people expressed during the early years of the decade. According to reports, young people were more rebellious in some regions of the country and in some social classes than others, but their antics were disturbing enough generally to cause the alarm of adults across the nation.[3]

Parents who felt harried occasionally by their own adolescents, found instinctive doubts supported and new fears instilled when they read national magazine articles on the "Destructive Younger

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[3]Ibid., p. 64.

Generation."[4] Adults pointed with dismay to the new knee-length dress fashions and the cheek-to-cheek dancing modes, seeing in them signs of certain depravity. Religious leaders deplored the widespread decline in personal faith and protested against young people's indulgence in the immoral behavior currently fashionable.[5] Some of these moral arbiters were extremely vague and euphemistic in their complaints about youth. (Indeed, one of their objections was to adolescents' "frank talk.../that/ smacks of boldness.")[6]

The principal criticism by the older generation of the young, though, seems to have been aimed at their smoking and drinking habits, their late-night joy-riding in automobiles, and their much-publicized petting and necking activities.[7] There was the feeling that, as one article expressed it, "the girls are actually tempting the boys more than the boys do the girls, by their dress and conversation."[8] It was also thought that impropriety was more conspicuous and less subject to adult restraint than it had been.[9] Defiant youth was seen not only as weakening all conventional moral codes, but as threatening the very "stability of our American civilization."[10]

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[4]A. Maude Royden, "The Destructive Younger Generation," Ladies' Home Journal, XLI (March, 1924), 31.

[5]Review and Expositor quoted in Sullivan, p. 480.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Allen, p. 63.

[8]Review and Expositor, Sullivan, p. 480.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

Many of the accounts of youthful misconduct reported in the contemporary press seem, in retrospect, to have been exaggerated; implied generalities and selected sensational examples caused inevitable distortions.[11] Even when allowing for this possible misrepresentation, however, the student of the Jazz Age must admit that the younger generation of the twenties differed in subtle, yet distinctive ways from the youth in preceding eras. Not all the school and college age people varied from previous norms, for instance in talent or socio-economic background, but a considerable number did. As the critic Maxwell Geismar suggests, referring to these young people, "to be typical in the twenties was to be superior."[12] As far as their backgrounds were concerned, many of them--certainly a higher percentage than in earlier decades--came from comfortably prosperous homes,[13] from urban[14] and burgeoning suburban areas, from respectable, well-to-do families.

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[11]An example of exaggerated press accounts with their distorting insinuations is the report on contemporary modes of dancing from the Catholic Telegraph: "The music is sensuous, the embracing of partners--the female only half dressed—is absolutely indecent; and the motions--they are such as may not be described, with any respect for propriety, in a family newspaper. Suffice it to say that there are certain houses appropriate for such dances; but those houses have been closed by law." Quoted in Allen, p. 63.

[12]Maxwell Geismar, "F. Scott Fitzgerald: Orestes at the Ritz," The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915-1925 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), p. 292.

[13]Sullivan, p. 383.

[14]Alexander Black, "Is the Young Person Coming Back?," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CXLIX (August, 1924), 340.

A further distinction, and perhaps the most significant one, between young people in the twenties and those in preceding generations was education. Jazz Age youths had far better opportunities for education than, for example, their parents, and they were reaping the benefits of a longer period of incubation before being faced with adult responsibilities.[15] As the prominent historian Mark Sullivan has noted:

> Youths who, if born a generation before, would have been behind the plow at fifteen, remained in high school until seventeen, or in some cases went to college until twenty-three, or even to post-graduate school until close to thirty.[16]

Acknowledging this accepted form of dependence on parents and, in the case of scholarships and travel opportunities, on other adults and the community at large, young people felt themselves part of a privileged group that society should respect. Their training and worldly experience convinced them of their own superiority.[17]

The would-be intellectuals in this group defended their generation with honesty and vigor in magazine essays. In sharp reaction to the criticism leveled at them, they hurled arguments directly back to their elders. John F. Carter, a college student writing in Atlantic Monthly, fiercely observed that,

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[15]Sullivan, p. 383.

[16]Ibid., pp. 383-384.

[17]Ibid., p. 384.

> The older generation had certainly pretty well ruined this world before passing it on to us. They give us this Thing, knocked to pieces, leaky, red-hot, threatening to blow up; and then they are surprised that we don't accept it with the same attitude of pretty, decorous enthusiasm with which they received it, 'way back in the eighteen-nineties, nicely painted, smoothly running, practically fool-proof.[18]

Elizabeth Benson, a precocious young essayist who was writing for Vanity Fair at age thirteen, defended the wild innovations in youthful behavior, insisting that adolescents were only profiting from parental examples. "We studied Freud, argued Jung, checked our dreams by Havelock Ellis, and toyed lightly with Adler. And all these authorities warned us of the danger in repressing our normal instincts and desires."[19]

Undoubtedly, many adults disapproved of such frank words from the young, but others genuinely sympathized. Some parents, believing in the superiority which their offspring claimed, even began imitating their ways. Sullivan writes on this, as follows: "On the dance floor, in the beauty parlor, on the golf course; in clothes, manners, and many points of view, elders strove earnestly to look and act like their children, in many cases their grand-children."[20] Youth was to be the keynote for the entire decade. During these years that marked

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[18]John F. Carter, Jr., "'These Wild Young People,' by One of Them," Fitzgerald and the Jazz Age, ed. Malcolm Cowley and Robert Cowley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 48.

[19]Elizabeth Benson quoted in Hoffman, Twenties, pp. 89-90.

[20]Sullivan, p. 386.

such a turning point in American cultural history,[21] a time when, as one historian has written, "the tastes of the crowd became an increasingly important determinant...[e.g.] in popular culture,"[22] the voice of the younger generation was as loud as it had ever been.

Historical writers analyzing this "ascendancy of youth,"[23] and its subsequent social revolution in American life, often cite the war as the primary causal factor: "Youth had fought the war; no matter what his years, any male who had gone through the war was a man, chartered to talk, think, and write like a man."[24] Others saw the war as the mere catalyst, hastening and dramatizing the inevitably changing trends in society.[25] Historian George Mowry finds a more reasonable explanation for the development of new codes of behavior in "the new urbanism and the mass consumer society."[26] In any case, the outcome of this emphasis on youth and social change was to have permanent repercussions in succeeding decades. Certainly the image of the "flapper" was one very important facet of "youth in rebellion."

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[21]Harvey Wish, Contemporary America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), p. 343.

[22]Mowry, p. 1.

[23]Sullivan, p. 386.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Wish, p. 312.

[26]Mowry, p. 173.

The Flapper in Evolution

The girl of the twenties era dramatized the revolution in morals and manners and shared full responsibility for it with her male counterpart, but she also exemplified the social aims in the struggle for women's rights in America. When the flapper first appeared, she was regarded as a particularly outlandish creature because she differed so radically from the noble ideal of Victorian femininity. What many people failed to realize was that she was a product of social evolution; she represented an ideal of womanhood that had undergone subtle change since the nineteenth century.

The emancipation of women had gradually been taking place around the world. First dramatized, perhaps, by Ibsen's Nora in A Doll's House in the 1880s,[27] it had seen ramifications in political and other spheres. American women gained the vote in 1920 and their victory encouraged them to strive for further rights. Among the social rights they sought was the freedom to adopt bold innovations in appearance and behavior. Social changes, then as in other times, were sometimes slow to come. Since the changes depended on the influencing of mass taste, they seldom took place without an initial period of stormy debate. It was the flapper—being young and therefore all the more culpable if nonconformist in her ways--who unconsciously took the brunt of this controversy. Supplanting the

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[27]Wish, p. 310.

Suffragette,[28] she won rights both basic and trivial that her female predecessors might not easily have imagined.

If the flapper was an accepted type of American womanhood by 1930, then she was certainly not ten years before that. The moral code to which young people were supposed to adhere in 1920 was not essentially different from what it had been a few decades earlier. It held that women, being "of finer stuff"[29] than men, had responsibilities as moral exemplars and guardians of youthful innocence. Young girls growing up under such protection were obliged to resist all sensual temptations, and were expected to look forward to a "romantic love match,"[30] officially sanctioned by the church, when the "right man" came along.[31] Explaining the social code as it applied to co-educational adolescent activities, F. L. Allen states:

> Boys and girls were permitted large freedom to work and play together, with decreasing and well-nigh nominal chaperonage, but only because the code worked so well on the whole that a sort of honor system was supplanting supervision by their elders; it was taken for granted that if they had been well brought up they would never take advantage of this freedom.[32]

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[28]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 317.

[29]Allen, p. 62.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid.

When this code began to break down in the early twenties, the guardians of the nation's morality grew increasingly uneasy and blamed the flapper. Her sudden arrival and her almost bizarre appearance marked her as the symbol of a new, careless way of life. Several years passed before she could be seen in a historical perspective, as a transitional figure with actual predessors and with probable successors.

The immediate forerunner of the flapper in American society was what Duncan Aikman, writing for Harper's, called the "good pal." Similarly a post-Victorian adolescent type, she was described as,

> the young virgin [who] put off the coyness, the simpering reserves, the sniffy innocence of the Victorian era. She prided herself on sharing in all male sports that were physiologically attainable, slapped us [the boys] in an ostentatiously sexless cameraderie, talked pertly of her equal powers and the equal rights coming to her, and almost wept that she could not be a man and play football and Rooseveltian politics.[33]

Aikman sensed that despite this bravado, the good pal felt uncertain of her own equality with men. The flapper, while an extension of the good pal, had no such doubts, and grew up a virtual "amazon of freedom" with absolutely none of these sex-determined feelings of inferiority. Aikman concluded that this historical progression of adolescent stereotypes had brought favorable change; the girl that had evolved—the flapper--he eulogized, had contributed to American libertarian ideals.

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[33]Duncan Aikman, "Amazons of Freedom," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLIII (June, 1926), 27.

She had asserted herself, "not by talking the logic of liberals but by being free."[34]

There were other writers discussing the flapper in popular journals of the early twenties, but few of them saw her as Mr. Aikman did. The majority were simply startled by her, and regarded her as a somewhat inexplicable, not altogether pleasant creature who seemed on the verge of disrupting the status quo in American society. While the term "flapper" rarely appeared in magazine articles before 1922, it was frequently used thereafter, throughout the decade. As early as 1919, magazines such as Delineator and Ladies' Home Journal lamented the decline of the traditional young lady ideal and reflected a growing anxiety about contemporary girls' immodest dress and aggressive manner.[35] They regretted that girls were no longer content with the conventional social pleasures of former years, the at-home gatherings, for example, that centered around an activity like fudge-making.[36] Instead, the flapper felt she should be taken out, preferably in her boy friend's car, for entertaining evenings. As one writer, noting this development, stated, "Social life ceased to mean assembly, chiefly it chugged."[37] It was advantageous to have a Stutz-Bearcat.

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[34]Ibid., 29.

[35]Edna Erle Wilson, "A Young Man's Fancy: To What Kind of Girl Does It Turn?," Delineator, XCVI (May, 1920), 88.

[36]Black, 341.

[37]Ibid.

Although most of the protests against the flapper concentrated on her appearance or conduct, a few critics considered her mind--and found it wanting. Warner Fabian, the author of Flaming Youth, a sensational novel of the twenties, was dismayed that young Pat's mind, while sufficiently alert and capable, was hopelessly undisciplined. It dwelt on superficialities, enjoyed being titillated by trivial reading matter, and delighted in expressing itself in crude, girlish slang.[38] Another writer, with quite a different complaint, regretted that girls in the younger generation had developed such skeptical minds, and such an eager willingness to tear down old beliefs without searching for constructive alternatives.[39] As the decade progressed, magazine articles continued to discuss these various aspects of the flapper; they worried, too, about her health, her religious attitudes, and her chances of happy marriage. Predictably, the opinions ranged widely.

If the popular concept of the flapper became exaggerated at times, it was partially caused by the influence of films. Hollywood's productions, then as now, tended to sensationalize everyday life, distorting it out of all recognition. In the twenties the new movie industry enjoyed immense popularity and revolutionalized mass

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[38]Warner Fabian [Samuel Hopkins Adams], from Flaming Youth, Cowley and Cowley, Fitzgerald and..., pp. 53-54.

[39]Royden, 174.

entertainment habits throughout the country.[40] Movies attracted young and old alike with enticing advertisements that promised "brilliant men, beautiful jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, petting parties in the purple dawn, all ending in one terrific smashing climax that makes you gasp."[41] Flapper-like starlets appeared on the silver screen and became glamorous ideals for many of the nation's female adolescents. One of the most popular of these, Clara Bow, the It-Girl, was deliberately created by an image-manipulator, Miss Elinor Glyn, who explained her intention as follows:

> I wanted to stir up in the cold hearts of the thousands of little fluffy, gold-digging American girls a desire for greater joys in life than are to be found in candy boxes and car rides and fur coats,...a desire to be loved as European women are loved; and as a result, a desire to give as well as to receive.[42]

Miss Glyn and other script writers like Anita Loos, of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes fame, thus perpetuated the image of a flapper particularly bewitching, if slightly unreal.

The comments that flappers made about themselves helped to balance these various exaggerations. Defending their attitudes against adult condemnation, girls pleaded for parental understanding and attempted to explain the special problems facing their

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[40]Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, "Inventions Remaking Leisure," Cowley and Cowley, Fitzgerald and..., p. 118.

[41]Allen, p. 71.

[42]Elinor Glyn quoted in Barrett, p. 61.

generation. One flapper, for example, wrote a magazine essay analyzing college students' difficulties in accepting traditional religious faith in an atmosphere that generally encouraged them to question beliefs and institutions.[43] Another emphasized girls' conscientious concern for maintaining certain moral standards in what must have seemed to them a fairly amoral world.[44] One ex-flapper, justifying her past, insisted that the young women of her era considered it virtuous to be "shameless, selfish and honest"[45] and they begged to be judged on this basis. They were proud of their energetic minds and forthright manners.

While the flapper was considered generally the representative American girl throughout the twenties decade, at least one critic announced in 1924 that technically she had been passé some time already.[46] He insisted that the girl imitating the flapper ideal had begun to acknowledge her excessive behavior as a mistake; she had recognized social pressures and had changed her outlook. She was at last emerging from her tumultuous cacoon, a lovely, mature individual, appreciative of beauty and wisdom.[47] George E. Mowry,

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[43]Marianna Wemple Priest, "The Younger Generation Speaks for Itself: Is the College Girl Irreligious?," Outlook, June 6, 1923, p. 125.

[44]An account of college women's conference on petting and campus life quoted in Mowry, p. 175.

[45]"Flapping...," Mowry, p. 174.

[46]Black, 344.

[47]Ibid., 346.

reflecting the more general view that the flapper's rebellion lasted until 1929 or 1930, maintained that her successor was a new feminine type, the "siren."[48] This new ideal was serene and skillful in her pursuit of life and men. As the New York Times suggested, she sought "to understand rather than to seek to be understood, to charm and delight rather than to demand amusement....She no longer has to bother about smashing tradition or demonstrating her superiority to convention."[49] Thanks to the flapper's liberalizing efforts, the siren possessed the freedom to be herself.

Such, then, was the flapper, as commonly depicted in the 1920s. Usually observed from a respectable distance, she was viewed by adult Americans in various ways: the It-Girl portrayed her as glamorous and sensual, D. Aikman saw her as the capable young heiress to the nation's liberal tradition, the Delineator decried her as an immodest disgrace to womanhood. Despite the varying attitudes concerning her, the flapper was generally regarded with suspicion and disparagement, for the image most frequently instilled in the popular mind presented her as a serious threat to the traditional status quo of mores and manners in American middle-class society.

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[48]Mowry, p. 184.

[49]Ibid., p. 186.

CHAPTER III

FITZGERALD RELATES TO JAZZ AGE AND FLAPPER

Maturation: The Man Develops

Literary critics in recent years have minimized the importance of biography as studied in relationship to a particular work of literature. This work of the New Criticism has led to a generally healthy trend in the analytical study of literature; however, the value of its contribution must not be exaggerated. There still remain works of literary art that can be understood and evaluated better in relation to the biographical experience of their creator, and the early works of F. Scott Fitzgerald are among these. Fitzgerald used himself constantly in his fiction, and while it would be unwise to establish too closely the causal relationship between the author's experience and his creative imagination, the student must account for Fitzgerald's own statement: "Sometimes, I don't know whether I'm real or whether I'm a character in one of my own novels."[1]

The following chapter is presented, then, with the assumption that an examination of Fitzgerald's life from the beginning of his prep-school days to the publication of his second novel--with an emphasis on his adolescent and collegiate relationships with girls--may be helpful in understanding his concept of the deb or flapper. Many of the most lifelike personages in his fiction are young women,

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[1]Fitzgerald quoted in Cross, p. 1.

and it is interesting to trace the life experiences that may have given him an insight into the female character. Were his heroines drawn directly from life? and if so, how did his reading and his poetic imagination affect his experience? A brief glance at his early social consciousness and his romantic awareness may suggest answers to these questions.

Born in the 1890s, Fitzgerald grew to maturity during a period in which much of the commercial and industrial wealth of post-Civil War America was consolidated. His hometown, St. Paul, Minnesota, had been expanding and prospering since the sixties, and its social strata included both the nouveaux riches and the shabby genteel. Fitzgerald's family contained elements of both,[2] and as a result, Scott felt, even while a youngster, the subtle ambiguity of his social position. As he grew into adolescence and realized painfully that his parents were clearly on the outskirts of St. Paul's glittering society, his discomfort increased.[3] Although their home was on the fashionable Summit Avenue, which Fitzgerald called "a street above the average," it was, he realized, "a house below the average."[4] Going to the exclusive St. Paul Academy made him aware of other boys' conspicuous wealth, as did his experience of being enrolled in a dancing school where other

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[2]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, pp. 4-5.

[3]Ibid., p. 26.

[4]Fitzgerald to Alida Bigelow, n.d., The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Andrew Turnbull (London: Bodley Head, Ltd., 1964), p. 456.

adolescents were driven to classes by liveried chauffeurs in Rolls Royces.[5] His rich imagination idealized these distinctive signs of wealth and prestige, and it reinforced his already determined ambition to become a social success, a "first-rate man."[6]

Young Scott actually enjoyed considerable popularity during his adolescence.[7] He seems to have had an average number of friends, and girls, particularly, found him attractive. He carefully observed his friends, and set down his feelings about them in notebooks which were later to provide material for his stories. He was acutely interested in the changing personal relationships and power shifts within his group, and was compulsively eager to know how he stood with the girls.[8] When he was fifteen Fitzgerald had a brief meeting with a girl and realized later that he had then sensed his "first faint sex attraction."[9] He recreated this moment in a story about Basil Duke Lee:

> Basil...rode over to Imogene Bissel and balanced idly on his wheel before her. Something in his face then must have attracted her, for she looked up at him, looked at him really, and slowly smiled.. ..For the first time in his life he realized a girl completely as something

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[5]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 23.

[6]Mizener, Paradise, p. 9.

[7]Charles E. Shain, F. Scott Fitzgerald (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 11.

[8]Mizener, Paradise, p. 20.

[9]Ibid.

> opposite and complementary to him, and he was subject to a warm chill of mingled pleasure and pain. It was a definite experience and he was immediately conscious of it.[10]

With typical self-consciousness, Fitzgerald noticed his own emotions while participating in special moments like this, and he unabashedly recorded these feelings afterwards. He analyzed delicate situations in his notebooks with utter honesty and careful attention to detail, as in the following: "She and I used to sit at the piano and sing. We were eighteen, so whenever we came to the embarrassing words 'lovey-dovey' or 'tootsie-wootsie' or 'passion' in the lyric, we would obliterate the indelicacy by hurried humming."[11]

For years Fitzgerald remained extremely conscious of himself in encounters with girls. Always concerned with his own appearance and desperately eager to charm, he cultivated manners calculated to impress others. The lengths he went to improve his "line" in college even included, one biographer has noted, his spending "hours before the mirror practicing the Maxixe, the Turkey Trot,"[12] and other popular dances of the day. Fitzgerald had gone to Princeton because he wanted to be like its undergraduates, whom he imagined as being slender and

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[10]Fitzgerald quoted in Ibid.

[11]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Notebooks--Youth and Army," Crack-Up, p. 240.

[12]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, pp. 69-70.

keen and romantic."[13] During his years there, he strove to be appreciated by his classmates and loved by the right girl.

The right girl for Fitzgerald was usually the most popular one.[14] He was instinctively challenged when he met a deb surrounded by beaux, and his sense of competition prodded him into action until he had outmaneuvered his opponents and won the girl.

Such was the case in January, 1915, when he met Ginevra King, a Chicagoan and the sixteen-year-old cousin of a St. Paul friend. Ginevra, a dazzling brunette with high color and a lively manner, was then attending a fashionable boarding school in the East and was already "getting quantities of mail from Yale, Harvard, and Princeton."[15] Besides being wealthy and beautiful and something of a celebrity, she had "already acquired a reputation for daring and adventurousness."[16] All these glamorous attributes made her madly attractive to the nineteen-year-old Scott, and he soon became completely infatuated. The romance developed and lasted for several months, largely sustained by correspondence, but it gradually waned as Ginevra yielded to the multiple attentions being paid her by other young men. Fitzgerald, who had idealized the friendship,[17] suffered a real blow

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[13] Ibid., p. 42.

[14] Ibid., p. 54.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Mizener, Paradise, p. 51.

[17] Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 56.

to his ego at losing this "Top Girl." In later reflection, however, with renewed confidence, he felt proud to have won her at all. Their romance represented for him an important social coup, a victory exemplified in the generalization he later made about himself: "I didn't have the two top things--great animal magnetism or money.... I had the two second things, tho', good looks and intelligence. So I always got the top girl."[18] Ginevra, then, was bound to be a significant influence not only in Fitzgerald's life, but in his early writings. She provided him with the inspiration and subject matter for some of his best works,[19] and helped him to formulate attitudes about women, wealth and society that would become central to his philosophy.

There were other influences on this young writer during his college years, though, namely his literary classmates and his extracurricular reading. Two of his intimate friends, Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop, both of them more intellectual than Fitzgerald, stimulated his literary enthusiasms and guided his creative efforts with their constructive criticism.[20] While Fitzgerald's achievements at this point in his career scarcely measured up to even his own standards, he was learning and writing a good deal and his talent was showing. His study of Keats' and Rupert Brooke's works helped him to

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[18]Fitzgerald quoted in Mizener, Paradise, p. xvii.

[19]In a letter to his daughter, he discussed "Ginevra King of Chicago and Westover, who later figured in This Side of Paradise." Letters, p. 19.

[20]Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 25.

improve his own poetic techniques[21] and his reading of Booth Tarkington, H.G. Wells, and especially Compton Mackenzie, provided him with fictional models from which to work.[22] Even as a novice, he was consciously exploring the relationship between an artist's life and his literary creations. The critic Andrew Turnbull has commented:

> From the outset, Fitzgerald adhered to the Renaissance and Romantic conceptions of the writer as a man of action who experiences his material at first hand--not from lack of imagination, but so he can write about it more intensely.[23]

The autobiographical impulse was to come easily for the fledgling author; learning to maintain a controlled, disengaged perspective on his writings would be more difficult.

The author's social sensibilities, as well as his writing skills, were developing at Princeton, and soon afterwards; Fitzgerald enjoyed a strong rapport with his collegiate friends, and furthermore, he developed through this camaraderie a feeling of kinship with his entire generation. His reflections on this closeness were particularly melancholy as he wrote letters in November, 1917. He, like so many Princetonians, had just joined the Army, and he felt that the War was forcing his generation of young men too quickly and violently

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[21]Ibid., p. 31. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" seems to have influenced Fitzgerald's thought, also.

[22]Edmund Wilson quoted in Mizener, Paradise, p. 38.

[23]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 75.

into adulthood. He regretted that even if he and the others returned from the front, they would be "rather aged--in the worst way."[24]

A more lighthearted example of Fitzgerald's awareness of his generation was the advice he wrote to his younger sister, as she was being launched socially. Sending her detailed instructions on appropriate party manners, conversation gambits and facial expressions guaranteed to please,[25] he revealed an extremely au courant knowledge of adolescent fads and fashions. These details--undeniably superficial yet important to peer-group conscious youngsters—when incorporated into his short stories, were to contribute to his resounding professional success. His works had a sufficient journalistic aura about them to cause youthful readers to regard them as absolutely true-to-life. (John O'Hara, who idolized Fitzgerald, represented the view of many young people when he praised This Side of Paradise in his high school newspaper saying, "The people were right, the talk was right, the clothes, the cars were real.")[26]

Achievement: The Writer Succeeds

Fitzgerald found the first weeks of Army life an adventure, but the initial glamour of this new routine wore off and he began concentrating his energies on a major literary project, the novel which would eventually become This Side of Paradise. His professional

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[24]Ibid., p. 79.

[25]Ibid., pp. 66-67.

[26]John O'Hara quoted in Piper, p. 42.

ambitions had crystallized: he wanted to become a serious writer and was determined to succeed. He devoted every spare minute to working on his book at the officers' club and had completed a draft by the time he was sent as a First Lieutenant to Camp Sheridan, Alabama, in the late spring of 1918.[27] It was here that the most important event of his Army career occurred: he met Zelda Sayre. From then on, his military activities assumed even less significance, declining almost to the realms of past experience, as his literary efforts and Zelda became the central focal points of Fitzgerald's life.

Zelda was the daughter of a respected judge in Montgomery. She had been an imaginative, restless child and now at eighteen, she was an insouciant hoyden--and a sparkling, golden-haired beauty. Very popular with the young officers at Camp Sheridan, she was surrounded by them at a dance when Fitzgerald first saw her. He was attracted by her loveliness immediately, and within weeks was deeply in love. Although Zelda hesitated to make the total commitment in the relationship that Scott did, she too fell in love.[28] She was as enchanted by his expressive handsomeness and glittering career possibilities as he was by her Southern charm and impetuous spirit; their romance showed great promise.

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[27]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 82.

[28]Mizener, Paradise, p. 84.

The months following his discharge from the Army in February, 1919, were difficult for Fitzgerald. Spurred by the ambition of marrying the girl of his dreams, he headed for New York, hoping to complete his novel and, more desperately, to find work.

He met frustration on various fronts. The job he found, writing streetcar advertisement placards, was drab and poorly paid. The short stories he worked on diligently, in his spare time, wouldn't sell.[29] Moreover, his romance soon began undergoing strains. He and Zelda had both envisioned themselves as prospective connoiseurs of the good life,[30] but that took more money than it seemed Fitzgerald could ever make. A doubting Zelda, unconvinced of Scott's great financial potential, finally broke the engagement. Fitzgerald despaired, got very drunk, then sobered up and began to work harder on his novel. From that low point his fortunes started to turn. This Side of Paradise, submitted to Scribners, was accepted in September. By November he had sold a story to the fashionable Saturday Evening Post. He became re-engaged to his beloved Zelda, and was ecstatic: each new day seemed to hold for him a glorious sense of "ineffable top-loftiness and promise."[31]

The spring of 1920 saw the fulfillment of Fitzgerald's fondest hopes--his book came out and he was married--and it ushered in what

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[29]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 98.

[30]Mizener, Paradise, p. 84.

[31]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 101.

would be the author's most glorious decade. He deeply loved his Top Girl and saw in her an "embodiment...of the splendid possibilities of life /that/ he could, in his romantic hopefulness, imagine."[32] They suddenly became glamorous celebrities in New York City, and yet, as one man-of-letters about town put it, they "appear/ed/ as fresh and innocent and unspoiled as characters in the idyllic world of pure romance."[33] The excitement of Manhattan captivated them, and together with the first royalty checks from the publisher, the Fitzgeralds set out to enjoy all they could in a city that was itself enjoying a gala post-war spree. Buoyed by their own happiness, they went about acting zany with gusto and charm. "They rode down Fifth Avenue on the tops of taxis because it was hot...or, in sheer delight at the splendor of New York, jumped, dead sober, into the Pulitzer fountain in front of the Plaza."[34]

In the months following their marriage, Fitzgerald was caught up in a dizzying world not only of love, but of sudden wealth and prestige. His novel skyrocketed him to unrivaled fame--a fame that changed him surprisingly little,[35] but that pleased him considerably. He had optimistically predicted two years earlier, that if his novel

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[32]Arthur Mizener, "Scott Fitzgerald and the Top Girl," Atlantic Monthly, CCVII (March, 1961), 55.

[33]Ernest Boyd, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," Portraits: Real and Imaginary (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924), pp. 217-218.

[34]Mizener, Paradise, p. 129.

[35]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 109.

were published, he would "wake up some morning and find that the debutantes have made me famous overnight,"[36] and his daydream had been realized. He had always been confident about his writing of This Side of Paradise: as he indicated to his friend Edmund Wilson in 1918, "I really believe that no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of our generation."[37]

Although Fitzgerald had apparently not intended his book to be a "bible of flaming youth,"[38] the nation's parents thought it one and were scandalized. Predictably, younger readers accepted it enthusiastically and acclaimed its faithfulness to truth.[39] Fitzgerald had at least succeeded in describing young people as they liked to see themselves.[40] The book, viewed by some readers as an authoritative

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[36]Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, [1918], Letters, p. 323.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Burton Rascoe, We Were Interrupted (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1947), p. 20.

[39]Writing about This Side of Paradise, Maxwell Geismar stated, "It was a manifesto, it expressed one's innermost convictions, it was perhaps the first 'real' book one had ever read. Like most literary landmarks, it was so absolutely convincing as to seem unlike a literary landmark." Geismar, "Orestes...," Provincials, p. 287. See also comment by O'Hara, footnote 26.

[40]Joseph Wood Krutch, "From the Decade this Side of Paradise," New York Herald Tribune Books, August 12, 1945, p. 1.

guide to modish adolescent behavior,[41] was considered in later years to have "exerted a drastic influence," especially on the Flapper Generation.[42]

If the young would-be flappers could find a fictional model for their behavior in Fitzgerald's novel, they could see a real-life ideal in his wife. The vivacious Zelda, who complemented her dashing husband so well, had rebelled against parental authority in adolescence,[43] and since then, had joined her generation's attempts to revamp the morals and manners of the nation. She stated the flapper's position in a 1922 article in Metropolitan Magazine:

> The Flapper awoke from her lethargy of sub-deb-ism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge and went into the battle. She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure, she covered her face with paint and powder because she didn't need it and she refused to be bored chiefly

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[41] Fitzgerald wrote a letter in 1921 to Miss Vas, a schoolgirl, admonishing her on the methods she was using to get her "values straightened out." She had presumably written him a glowing fan-letter, praising the advice implied in This Side of Paradise. Letters, p. 470. In addition, Geismar called Fitzgerald's first novel "the generation's masculine primer." Geismar, "Orestes...," Provincials, p. 287. And Katharine Brush, who seems to have been a bit of a flapper as well as a budding writer claimed that she "wasn't the same again for years" after discovering Fitzgerald and his works. Katharine Brush, This Is On Me (Garden City, N.Y.: Blue Ribbon Books, 1943), p. 104.

[42] B. F. Wilson, "Notes on Personalities--IV. F. Scott Fitzgerald," Smart Set, LXXIII (April, 1924), 29.

[43] Mizener, Paradise, p. 80.

> because she wasn't boring. She was conscious that the things she did were the things she had always wanted to do.[44]

Basking in their popularity, the Fitzgeralds expressed opinions such as these and wrote about themselves in occasional magazine essays. At the same time, Scott pursued his serious writing projects: by 1922 he had published his second novel, The Beautiful and Damned, as well as numerous short stories, the best of which were collected into two anthologies. The Fitzgeralds remained in the social spotlight all the while, enjoying a heyday of public recognition. Their lively schedule included a continual round of weekend house parties and reunions with friends. They moved to the suburbs and back again, took a trip to Europe, and had a child. Although they were still happy together, their personal lives suffered from their increased irresponsibility. Sensing the dangers of their frivolous abandonment, they sought to put some order in their lives;[45] too often they sought in vain. Later, when Fitzgerald's troubles had multiplied and grown to a tragic climax, he looked back upon these years of his early success with heartbreaking nostalgia. There had been a time "when the fulfilled future and the wistful past were mingled in a single gorgeous moment--when life was literally a dream."[46]

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[44]Zelda Fitzgerald quoted in Ibid., p. 82.

[45]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 128.

[46]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Early Success," Crack-Up, p. 90.

Out of this mixture of dream and reality, of fantasy and despair, grew the laureate of the Jazz Age. From the railroad platforms in Chicago and the Army camps in Alabama, possessing the delicious potential of dream and the bitter cruelty of real life, came Ginevra and Zelda into the impressionable mind of young Scott Fitzgerald. Directly inspiring the author's creative sensibilities, yet transmuted by his lively, romantic genius, they joined the other people and experiences meaningful in Fitzgerald's youthful past and poured out onto the pages of his early books and stories to present the waiting generation with an image of the flapper which could be understood and appreciated.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLAPPER AS "TOP GIRL"

Fitzgerald and the Younger Flapper

American popular magazines in the early twenties frequently credited Fitzgerald with having "discovered" the flapper.[1] Such heralding was probably exaggerated, yet the author often seemed to live up to his reputation, for the majority of his early stories depicted flapper-type coeds and described their joys and problems. Because Fitzgerald was learning his craft during this era when social changes among the young were being given special notice, and because his stories, published initially in magazines, reached a wide audience, his relationship with the flappers themselves became legendary.

This relationship was strongly rooted in Fitzgerald's sympathetic understanding of the girls he had known in his school and college years. These friends provided him with direct knowledge of feminine behavior and nourished his growing awareness of the anxieties of all adolescents. He self-consciously examined the traits that determined the popularity of some St. Paul girls and incorporated them into the heroines of his fiction. Two particular stories, "Bernice Bobs her Hair" and "A Woman with a Past," reflect perhaps his earliest awareness of the emotional adjustments of adolescents; the stories analyze the whimsical fashions of teenage charm and the problems these

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[1]Cowley and Cowley, p. 189.

fashions pose for individual girls. "Bernice Bobs her Hair" concerns a timid wallflower who tries to improve her popularity by submitting to the drastic measure of a barber's shears; she finds, to her dismay, that by doing so, she has been too daring for the community of men she is trying to attract. "A Woman with a Past" portrays a flirtatious seventeen-year-old who toys carelessly with a man's kindness to her; when she fails to win his uncritical love, she learns something about mature friendship. Fitzgerald handled these stories with careful taste and compassion, and the results are sensitive portraits of young flappers-to-be, adolescents learning, often painfully, about themselves.

The majority of his stories written from 1920 to 1922, however, concern slightly older girls, or at least those who have become better acquainted with the manners of romance. Pretty and popular, these girls pride themselves on their cultivated beauty and their ability to win men's hearts. They are introduced in the stories by various labels in addition to "flapper," including "deb" and "speed," and while such terms are only vaguely defined, they carry subtly different meanings. A "deb," for example, is similar in reference to today's "debutante," a girl at a specific phase in her social development, and a "speed" is a romantically precocious girl, known to have been kissed. All these female characters relate in some measure to Fitzgerald's notion of a "top girl"; that is, they are "lovely and expensive, and about nineteen,"[2] and they epitomize a glamorous ideal as they rise to

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[2]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Descriptions of Girls," Crack-Up, p. 113.

the height of their social success. It is these girls who exemplify Fitzgerald's image of the young flapper.

Fitzgerald exhibits a double perspective in his view of the flapper: he is alternately realistic and romantic, describing her as most people see her, and then as he (often through the mouthpiece of his stories' heroes) sees her. His romantic inclinations and personal viewpoint dominate the characterizations, so that Fitzgerald's young flappers often seem to be the ideal heroines of a golden dream world, where all is youthful and glamorous. True-to-life details merge in a momentary atmosphere of frothy, romantic fantasy. The sketches in This Side of Paradise, "The Offshore Pirate," and "Winter Dreams" supply concrete examples.

Rosalind as "Top Girl"

Fitzgerald's first novel, This Side of Paradise, is a candid portrait of adolescent life, and although its principal purpose is to depict the progress toward maturity of Amory Blaine, a young man who resembles Fitzgerald himself, the book also presents several vivid sketches of the girls in Fitzgerald's (Amory's) generation. The most thoroughly delineated flapper in the novel is Rosalind Connage, the leading figure in Amory's love life. She has reached the age of her greatest beauty, charm and popularity. She has outgrown "puppy-love" and has been driven to boredom by casual romances, and thus, is potentially ready to fall seriously in love. Coming from an upper-middle-class family, as well as being young and beautiful, Rosalind conforms closely to Fitzgerald's criterion for a "top girl."

Rosalind's qualities as a "top girl" are not immediately apparent, however. She is seen instead as a selfish, somewhat obnoxious "deb" at her own coming-out party, and her overt behavior marks her as a brazen flapper. She stalks around the party with a haughty, petulant air, acting like a rather brash, if not really improper young woman. She noisily, consciously rebels against her parents, defying her mother's wish that she encourage the attentions of certain wealthy, eminently eligible bachelors. She also rebels against the tedious youths who are striving too earnestly for her affections, and who are startled at her casual lack of emotional commitment to them, merely because she has kissed them on previous occasions. Rosalind resents the double standard of romantic behavior prevailing in her society and she does not hesitate to express her opinion vehemently. If she is a good deal bolder than the boys who seek her affection, she is at least honest. And although her behavior at the party is unconventional, she, like several of Fitzgerald's flappers, is less extreme in actuality than in talk.

It is in the scenes where Rosalind appears with Amory that she reveals the "top girl" loveliness and natural charm that is different from the superficial qualities of the flapper. Here her manner is less strained and consciously rebellious; she is calmly self-assured rather than raucously exhibitionistic. She and Amory soon establish a genuine rapport, so that she feels sufficiently at ease to be able to express spontaneously her private thoughts. She philosophizes with the simple, frank sincerity of Salinger's Holden Caulfield. She wishes

there were real sentiment in the world; instead she finds only false. Amory listens dreamily to this lovely girl as they sit quietly in the Connage's den, and he declares himself in love with her. Rosalind's feelings are mellow now, too, but her utter truthfulness tempers their expression: "I love you--now."[3] Amory's admiring view of Rosalind, credible enough for the reader to share, reinforces the enchanting effect of this appealing feminine creature.

In addition to depicting Rosalind as soft-spoken and thoughtful, these scenes with Amory portray her as capable of deep and sincere emotion. Through Fitzgerald's sensitive, artful control of the story, one sees the affection that Rosalind holds for Amory as touchingly real. The two have built a cozy, private world of shared experience and are pleasantly living in its intimacy. While both characters seem more innocent than they did when seen in a group situation, Rosalind especially, seems subtly changed: she is more feminine and gentle, as if retrieved from her previous callous behavior by love. "Now I know," she says, "how much a kiss can mean."[4] The atmosphere is golden and young love is an overwhelming, if momentary, reality. This golden dream world of young romance is certainly a part of the setting of Fitzgerald's "top girl."

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[3]F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 185.

[4]Ibid., p. 189.

Isabelle, Ardita and Judy as "Top Girls"

One of Amory Blaine's earliest adventures in love was his romance with Isabelle Borgé who, like Rosalind, was noted for her attractive appearance and wealthy family. She was also known at age sixteen as a "speed," and when she visited her cousin in Amory's hometown, she decided that, as such, she had a distinctly advantageous reputation. Isabelle's beauty is illusive and is described as a part of her charming manner, which captivates Amory. The reader learns that, "Flirt smiled from her large black-brown eyes and shone through her intense physical magnetism."[5] More importantly, one learns that, "Her education or, rather, her sophistication, had been absorbed from the boys who had dangled on her favor;...her capacity for love-affairs was limited only by the number of the susceptible within telephone distance."[6] The key to Amory's initial attraction for Isabelle is her great popularity, a prime requisite for a "top girl," for it serves as a general endorsement of all her other attributes. For Fitzgerald, the "top girl" not only had a youthful sparkle, a moneyed background and a magnetic physical allure, she possessed the added charm of being admired by many.

Nevertheless, Isabelle does not conform as completely as Rosalind to the "top girl" image, Fitzgerald's flapper ideal, since her loveliness is marred by an excessive display of conceit. Aware,

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[5]Ibid., p. 63.

[6]Ibid.

at her cousin's party, that she has enjoyed a wider social experience than the adolescents around her, she maintains an attitude of amused condescension toward them. Fitzgerald's realistic details of this spoiled child's insolent behavior succeed in overcoming his usual romantic, sympathetic viewpoint. As if to compensate for this, Fitzgerald attempts to minimize Isabelle's haughty self-satisfaction, when he dramatizes the short-lived infatuation between her and Amory, by implying that an aggressive narcissism is natural to both adolescents. With shrewd insight he sees, behind the couple's pseudo-sophisticated, parrying manner, their attempts not so much to get to know one another, but to glimpse through each other a reflection of their own personalities. As the critic Charles Shain has written of this flapper and her boy friend, "They talk, and each one says to the other, unconvincingly, 'Tell me about yourself. What do you feel?' Meaning, "Tell me about myself. How do I feel?'"[7] Fitzgerald interprets some of the flapper's arrogance as the expression of a legitimate search for self-knowledge, and he views her as being very much in the process of growing up, with each new experience hopefully leading toward her eventual emotional maturity.

It is Fitzgerald's style that gives the description of Isabelle what beauty and romance there is in her. He is able to capture the tone of the transitory feelings that she experiences in her brief fascination with Amory, and these moments are portrayed with a sense

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[7]Shain, p. 21.

of love-heightened atmosphere and emotional drama. When Isabelle and Amory are on the brink of sharing a kiss, the scene is interrupted and their moment of certain ecstacy is gone. One senses their feeling of regret as the mood of the scene changes decisively. When they finally do rush into an embrace and share a fervent kiss, the momentary joy they feel is definite and acutely perceived. This girl, not even as inherently appealing as Rosalind, has ephemeral magic when seen through young Amory's eyes.

The fantasy entitled "The Offshore Pirate" is one of Fitzgerald's first short stories containing a fully-labeled flapper, Ardita Farnum. (Regarding this label, it is the present writer's contention that Fitzgerald felt Ardita to resemble more closely his concept of the "flapper" than she did his notions of the "baby vamp," "deb" or "speed." She possesses the best of what the novelist seems to have considered the typical characteristics of real-life Jazz Age flappers.)

The setting of the story is a luxurious yacht somewhere off the Florida coast, and Ardita, its heroine is a vibrant beauty, "about nineteen, slender and supple, with quick gray eyes full of radiant curiosity."[8] Like Isabelle, she is lovely though spoiled, as fascinating to her peers as she is disrespectful to her elders. The amusingly improbable plot centers around her being kidnapped, tricked into a situation beyond her own control, and being surprised and

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[8]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Offshore Pirate," Flappers and Philosophers, ed. Arthur Mizener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 17.

overwhelmed by a young man more egotistical, rebellious and ingenious than she. When, at the end of the tale, she discovers that the wily "pirate" who has secreted her away is in fact an eminently respectable young bachelor, whom she would have scorned under more normal courtship circumstances, she graciously swallows her pride and eagerly agrees to marry him. In short, she is depicted as a surprisingly adaptable girl.

Ardita contributes an additional dimension to Fitzgerald's concept of the young flapper, as portrayed in his early stories, in that she has definite, positive ambitions; they inevitably cause her trouble. In her opening scene, she is having a temper tantrum, arguing furiously with her guardian, an elderly uncle, who insists that she has disgraced the family's name by conspicuously carrying on an outrageous infatuation with a notorious libertine. She defends her affection, declaring that the roué is "the only man I know, good or bad, who has an imagination and the courage of his convictions."[9] Like Rosalind, she is strong in her own opinions and courageous, if vehement, in her rebellion from adult authority.

In later scenes, when Ardita has been made the virtual prisoner of the pirate and has heard the dramatic account of his daring ventures, she realizes that her defiances of convention seem, in recollection, slight by comparison. She recognizes that he has rebelled from what was expected of him in life to a greater extent than she, and has

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[9]Ibid., p. 20.

(according to the line he has given her) used his imagination considerably to set high social goals for himself. Suddenly she finds herself bored with her own problems and extremely interested in his. As for her own attitudes, she is forced to defend them against his many criticisms. Just when she wants desperately to be considered on her own merits, he treats her comments lightly, as those typical of an aristocrat or a silly flapper. (In this respect, Ardita's boy friend undoubtedly reflects a popular tendency in 1920, when flappers were new on the American scene, to categorize these girls generally, disregarding or frowning upon them collectively, rather than judging them according to their individual characteristics.) Ultimately Ardita grows to thrive on her friend's challenges; her self-concept benefits from being confronted with his, and she gains a new perspective on her self. Fitzgerald's flapper is here seen struggling to define and maintain her own identity, and she is shown at a particular moment of self-realization.

Judy Jones, who will be considered both in this and the following chapter, is the heroine of "Winter Dreams," an ambitious tale that covers an extended period of time, tracing Judy from her eleventh year to her twenty-seventh. The story's central focus is on her changing relationship with Dexter Green, a promising young businessman. Told through the viewpoint of Dexter's enamoured eyes, the story portrays these young people as they develop their own interests and ambitions and as they drift in and out of each other's lives.

From the first scene, Judy is described as a siren as well as a beauty. Dexter immediately recognizes her astonishing potential beauty when seeing her as a little girl: she looks to him like the kind of child who is "destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men."[10] As anticipated, Judy's potential is realized and Dexter is one of the many men to succumb to her witch-like charms. She becomes a rosy-cheeked, athletic young woman "of passionate vitality,"[11] and for years she exerts a powerful influence over him. Even after he has sacrificed for her and lost her favor several times, after he has grown up and begun to lead a stable life of his own, Dexter maintains his "winter dreams." His illusions about this remarkable creature gain almost mythical proportions, and they promise to cause him additional grief in the future.

Fitzgerald's characterization of Judy Jones seeks to define the "top girl's" magnetic allure, and it succeeds in creating the most dream-like flapper heroine of all. Underlying Judy's magic are the usual attributes: she is about nineteen, has a prestigious social position, and is dazzling in appearance; but she has more attributes as well. She has a compelling, intense personality that she constantly uses to her advantage and that proves devastating for Dexter. "Whatever Judy wanted," the story's narrator records, "she went after with

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[10]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Winter Dreams," Babylon Revisited and Other Stories (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 115.

[11]Ibid., p. 120.

the full pressure of her charm."[12] There is a solid glitter about Judy: she is, as described at a country club dance, "a slender enamelled doll in cloth of gold."[13] Yet there is also a sheer, ineffable quality in her loveliness. Tough and fragile at once, she is infinitely desirable for Dexter.

The significance in this story of Dexter Green's distinctive viewpoint cannot be over-estimated. It is the vehicle that allows Fitzgerald to describe the flapper, the ideal girl of his generation, as he interprets her. What he depicts is a young woman of extraordinary natural charm who represents much more to an impressionable young man like Dexter Green than a pleasing figure of womanhood. She embodies all of his dreams of personal ambition and symbolizes the fulfillment of his own imagined dream-world. She is as romantic a heroine as Fitzgerald ever conceived.

The "Top Girl": Fitzgerald's Dream Girl

Rosalind, Isabelle, Ardita, Judy--these, then, are some of Fitzgerald's most representative individual portraits of "top girls," charming young flappers riding on the crest of their first social success. Acting alternately mature and childish, haughty and modest, these girls display the paradoxical ways of typical real-life adolescents. They are preoccupied with themselves, and are eager to extend the horizons of their own experience. In their endeavors, they

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[12] Ibid., p. 125.

[13] Ibid., p. 129.

often reject the advice of their parents' generation, and they struggle to reconcile private hopes with the expectations that others have for them. The flappers seek recognition and adoration, especially from handsome eligible beaux, but also they become bored by their own romantic conquests. Wanting to be themselves, they want nevertheless to submit their personalities in a love relationship; their conflicts, internal and external, are considerable.

When these girls experience moments of self-knowledge or mature love, they seem transformed somewhat from their slick, artificial ways. Fitzgerald highlights these occasions and effectively captures the atmosphere surrounding a flapper at a special moment of emotional importance to her. In so doing, the novelist casts an aura of idealistic beauty on his flapper characters. Fitzgerald once defended his representation of Princeton in This Side of Paradise by saying it was "the Princeton of Saturday night in May."[14] His Jazz Age heroines are similarly transmuted and idealized by imagination and romance. They epitomize Fitzgerald's faith in the precious vitality of youth and its potential for great happiness.

The author's boundless, optimistic faith in youth (and particularly, one suspects, in the potential of beautiful young women) was strong in the period from 1920 to 1922, and it inspired much of his early work, even as it directed the progress of his life as a young man. Being no less a product of the American Dream than a Horatio

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[14]Fitzgerald to John Grier Hibben, June 3, 1920, Letters, p. 462.

Alger hero, Fitzgerald believed in the possibility of personal success and, through his fiction, he shared with his youthful audience in the early twenties the confidence of his own newly achieved triumph. Uplifted by his own exuberance for life and love, he viewed his contemporaries through an enhanced imagination and created from them fictional characters who were witty, vivacious and attractive.

Beneath Fitzgerald's exuberant confidence at the time of writing the stories considered in this chapter, lay his long-held feelings of social inferiority, and these feelings also contributed to his creation of romanticized heroines--girls like Judy Jones, who were beautiful, wealthy and often inaccessible. Trying to compensate for the inadequacies of his own background, Fitzgerald, the golden-haired youth, had self-consciously set about, in his hometown and at prep-school, to charm others; with his intelligence and handsome looks he frequently succeeded. From the tensions between his adolescent insecurity and his adult success came his portrayals of the flapper. If his early heroines reflected the particular traits of the girls he had known in St. Paul, they also showed the effects of having been distilled through the romantic imagination of the genius of the Jazz Age.

The "Top Girl": Relationship to Flapper

One finds, in comparing the fictional creations of that romantic imagination with the flappers described in the magazines of the twenties decade that there are definite similarities between the

two groups, particularly in the girls' public conduct and in their attitudes. The comment in Harper's, that flappers did not feel a sex-determined sense of inferiority, applies equally well to Rosalind, Isabelle, Ardita and Judy. Furthermore, the observation helps explain the brash behavior of both sets of girls: their casual use in public of tabacco and, occasionally, alcohol; their bold conversations and sports enthusiasms, their aggressive manners and precocious mastery of the arts of romance. Fitzgerald's young flappers, no less than those described in Collier's appear bolder than the boys whose attentions they seek so constantly, and they manifest clever, yet undisciplined minds, concerned largely with trivia. Both groups of flappers pride themselves on being "shameless, selfish and honest";[15] they are restless, active girls who much prefer swinging a golf-club all afternoon or doing highdives into the sea, to making fudge at a cozy, parentally chaperoned home party. Finally, like the historical leaders of the younger generation's revolt, who supposedly are from upper-middle class homes, Fitzgerald's debs are from respectable, moneyed families. As if in deliberate defiance of the status quo, both groups are depicted as striking death blows to the traditional young lady ideal.

Despite these similarities, there are also substantial differences between the image of the flapper as exemplified in Fitzgerald's young heroines and the popular concept of the flapper in the twenties.

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[15]"Flapping...," Mowry, p. 175.

Fitzgerald's girls, for example, do not vary among themselves to the extent of the historical models, who range from movie starlets, pursuing fame and fortune, to collegiate intellectuals, dissecting religion and Freudian psychology. Rosalind, Isabelle, Ardita and Judy not only lack the self-fulfillment of many of the flappers described in the twenties' journals, they are vague and inarticulate about their life goals. One consequence of Fitzgerald's girls lacking certain self-knowledge and personal development is that their actions seem far less consequential than do those of the outspoken young people popularly regarded in American life. As opposed to the wicked adolescents decried in the Review and Expositor, seen as threatening the stability of America's civilization, the characters from This Side of Paradise and "The Offshore Pirate" are innocuous in their antics and negligible in their sphere of influence.

Popular contemporary or historical accounts and Fitzgerald's stories differ, also, in their views of the flapper's appearance. Descriptions in magazines pay close attention to the specific fashions that mark her: chemise dress, rolled-down hosiery, rouged cheeks and short-cropped hair. Fitzgerald, on the contrary, describes his heroines' appearance or beauty impressionistically, emphasizing its mysterious qualities. Except for an occasional reference to individual colors--of hair, eyes or clothing--Fitzgerald prefers to use highly connotative phrases, like "eternal kissable mouth,"[16] to describe his

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[16]Fitzgerald, Paradise, p. 171.

heroines' features. Concerned with conveying the total impression of a particular girl, he relates her physical appearance to her charming manner, and sees these, moreover, in the definite atmosphere of a certain time and place. The following description of young womanhood, as elusive as a perfume whiff in a silk scarf, provides an extreme, but not entirely uncharacteristic example of Fitzgerald's impressionistic technique:

> How the unforgettable faces of dusk would blend to her, the myriad footsteps, a thousand overtones, would blend to her footsteps; and there would be more drunkenness than wine in the softness of her eyes on his. Even his dreams now were faint violins drifting like summer sounds upon the summer air.[17]

How far this account lies, in tonal effect, from a generalized factual statement on the brittle Jazz Age flapper, is obvious.

Fitzgerald's connotative descriptions of an individual flapper's appearance have their equivalent in his portrayals of her petting and necking activities, and again, his accounts diverge from the "factual" records of social history. Popular magazines of the twenties regard these adolescent activities almost exclusively in disparaging terms, condemning them as gross misbehavior, unusual and sinful. Fitzgerald's view, meanwhile, is sympathetic: he suggests approval by accentuating the romantic feelings accompanying such behavior, and by presenting

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[17]Fitzgerald quoted in Walter Fuller Taylor, "Pioneers of the Second Generation: F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and Ernest Hemingway (1899-)," The Story of American Letters (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956), p. 399.

descriptions of petting and necking from an adolescent, rather than an adult, perspective. His talkative heroines, like Rosalind, are shown rationalizing all their self-conscious experimentation in romantic games as an amusing pastime but also as evidence of their protest against a double standard existing in their society. If boys could casually go from embrace to embrace with impunity, why could not girls? There is a philosophical rationale, then, that Fitzgerald's flappers utilize, in defending their behavior; but even with such philosophical gymnastics, Fitzgerald's young debs are not as brazen in their actions as in their talk. In the final analysis—if the critical magazine articles on the immoral younger generation are to be believed--Fitzgerald's flappers and their boy friends, in fact, exchange kisses and embraces with relative propriety, compared to their historical counterparts.

Herein lie, then, the specific differences between Fitzgerald's image of the young flapper and the popular concept of her. What emerges from Fitzgerald's short stories and This Side of Paradise, is a flapper more beautiful, innocent and illusive than those depicted in popular journals and contemporary histories of the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald has been a youthful commentator on the younger generation, an in-group reporter translating for the outside world of adults the thoughts and feelings of many actual adolescents; yet he has been, in addition, a writer with the peculiar individual vision of a creative artist. His own experience and that of his generation

have been percolated through an imagination both romantic and idealistic. The resulting portraits have inevitably shown the effects of such filtration.

CHAPTER V

THE FLAPPER AS "AGING WOMAN"

Fitzgerald and the Older Flapper

As it has been noted in preceding chapters, many of Fitzgerald's early novels and short stories not only dramatized the activities and emotions of individual young people, but also reflected the general "accent on youth" that was evident in 1920's America. The younger generation had drawn attention to itself in various ways. More adolescents were getting an education than in previous years, and some youths, taking advantage of the relative fluidity in financial and social worlds, were showing their ability to rise through business ventures from the proverbial rags to riches in a short time. Fitzgerald helped indicate to the public his generation's interest in being accepted as an important segment of American society and he, in his own career, epitomized the young entrepreneur who had achieved early success.[1]

A similar emphasis on youth exists in today's society. Minors form a greater proportion of the American population each year and receive considerable public attention. The nation's adolescents are increasingly recognized as a definite power group and their opinions determine the shape of much in present-day culture, from automobile advertisements to voting age legislation. Along with the great

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[1]Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's (New York: Viking Press, 1959), p. 292.

enthusiasm that society places on youth, there is a corresponding anxiety about aging. The middle years, a period to be postponed as long as possible, are projected as a dreary time at best, since the Pepsi generation makes no allowance for receding hairlines and expanding waists. The title of the cover article in a recent popular magazine, "The New American Women: through at 21,"[2] evidences contemporary apprehension about aging. Indeed, middle age tends to encroach on everyone more devastatingly these days than it formerly did.

As if analyzing facets of today's society instead of reflecting those of his own, Fitzgerald exhibits this concern about loss of youth. Many of his early writings are preoccupied with the somewhat crucial problems of individuals who, as the modern phrase goes, feel "washed up," past all stages of self-fulfillment, by their twenty-first or twenty-fifth year. Fitzgerald felt keenly the pathos of aging, and if the expressions of his personal worry, such as the comment he made sometime before his twenty-second birthday in a letter to Edmund Wilson, "God! How I miss my youth,"[3] seemed comical to others, they were not to the author himself. Undoubtedly the frustrations imposed on him by his spectacular early success increased his fear of growing old too quickly. Even at age twenty-four, before he had finished his second novel, he felt nearly "past his prime." It was not surprising that his anxieties should creep into that novel.

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[2] Esquire, LXVII (February, 1967), 57.

[3] Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, 1918, Letters, p. 324.

Being a great observer of feminine life and fashion, Fitzgerald realized that the problem of aging must be particularly acute for young women. Time was their enemy even more than his, destroying beauty and vitality. So much of feminine charm depended on what Fitzgerald called "physical magnetism" and the deterioration of this surface beauty for him was a sad, if inevitable process.[4] For the flappers in his stories the fate was worse yet, since it usually meant the loss of a spectacular beauty, a key attribute of the flapper's distinction of being "lovely and nineteen."

The heroines considered in the following pages reflect Fitzgerald's interpretation of this aging process. Working on an individual and intensely personal level, the author aims to reveal in his female characterizations the girls' responses to the actual realization of getting "old," i.e. reaching age twenty-four or so. He attempts to portray the emotional, intellectual and social adjustments that a "top girl" must make as she matures; he seeks to dramatize the period in each flapper's life when uncertainties develop, challenging her previously established self-confidence, the time when expedient compromises in self-fulfillment replace former glorious, glamorous hopes. He seems particularly eager to describe the subtle, momentary manifestations of this inevitable transition. A prime example of Fitzgerald's aging

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[4]There is real dismay, yet wistful compassion, in his casual remark, "She was a faded but still lovely woman of twenty-seven." Fitzgerald quoted in "They Paused to Remark," American Opinion, IX (May, 1966), 20.

heroines is his "famous flapper,"[5] Gloria Gilbert, from The Beautiful and Damned.

Gloria as "Aging Woman"

The story of The Beautiful and Damned concerns a sensitive young aristocrat, Anthony Patch, and his beautiful wife, Gloria, and it follows their courtship and the early years of their marriage, through their life of increasing dissolution. Finally, the plot relates, as Fitzgerald wrote of it, how these two "are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation."[6] When the book was published, The Beautiful and Damned was thought to be an autobiographical portrait of the author and his attractive wife, Zelda, and indeed it does contain details drawn from the Fitzgeralds' early married life.[7] The author's most perceptive critic, Arthur Mizener, however, prefers to consider the book's main characters as "what the spoiled priest in Fitzgerald thought the Fitzgeralds might become."[8] As the novelist later wrote to his daughter about himself and Zelda, "We had a much better time than Anthony and Gloria had."[9]

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[5]John Peale Bishop quoted in Hoffman, Twenties, p. 92.

[6]Fitzgerald to Charles Scribner II, August 12, 1920, Letters, p. 145.

[7]Fitzgerald quoted in Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 131.

[8]Mizener, Paradise, p. 137.

[9]Fitzgerald quoted in Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 131. The author felt, nevertheless, that his characters were representative. He wrote, "Gloria and Anthony...are two of the great army of the rootless who float around New York. There must be thousands." Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, [January, 1922], Letters, p. 331.

That is not saying much, though, for the lives of Anthony and Gloria, throughout most of the novel, are wretched indeed. That they begin their adult life with bright prospects of happiness is little consolation, for even then, their flawed characters carry seeds of potential destruction. Anthony is an egoist, cultivated and debonair, who feels superior to ordinary Americans, and will not upset his life of leisure by getting a job. His wife--a noted beauty and former "speed," who is known at Ivy League proms as "Coast to Coast Gloria"--joins him in idleness as they wait for the materialization of a fabulous inheritance, expected from Anthony's elderly millionaire grandfather. The couple live with hedonistic recklessness, justified, for themselves, at least, by their belief that life is meaningless. When their careless behavior causes them to be cut from the grandfather's will, they contest the decision and, after many years of litigation, eventually win their long-awaited money. But by this time their moral and physical deterioration is beyond repair; Gloria has lost her youthful beauty and Anthony his mind, and their marriage has become an unfortunate compromise.

While Fitzgerald intended that Anthony should dominate The Beautiful and Damned, Gloria is the more outstanding and convincing character.[10] When first seen, she is a sweet young thing, with a flippant manner and a penchant for chewing gumdrops; she is not unlike the heroines of This Side of Paradise, except that at twenty-two, she

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[10]Piper, p. 92.

has been at the flirting game for a longer time. She is meant to have a spiritual quality about her (evidenced by her idealization in the stilted chapter, "The Beauty and the Voice"), but this spirituality is scarcely noticeable.

Despite Gloria's excessive self-interest and her occasionally vulgar manner, she is appealing to Anthony. She has an incredibly vibrant quality: Anthony notices with fascination her responsive face, her "wonderfully alive expressions,"[11] and her constant verve. Anthony is charmed out of the egoism that has thus far dominated him and is lured into a romantic relationship with this exceptional beauty and pert personality. Gloria flirts with Anthony's affections for several months, while continuing to see other men; then finally she agrees to marry him, more for security and for the novelty of being engaged, one suspects, than for mature love. Early in that year, her twenty-second, she has displayed a changed attitude toward men: wearied by undergraduate admirers and "no longer going around with 'first-rate men,'"[12] she already shows indications of clutching for youth and beauty.[13] Trying, through sheer vanity and will power, to be eighteen again no longer works.

Her struggle against aging continues throughout the novel. Each birthday, bringing her closer to thirty, is a traumatic experience,

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[11]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1966), p. 62.

[12]Geismar, p. 300.

[13]Fitzgerald, Beautiful, p. 70.

and every year increases her apprehension of eventual defeat. Her growing insecurity and predisposition to carelessness belie her hearty, rebellious manner and carpe diem philosophy. The reader learns that, "from her conversation it might be assumed that all her energy and vitality went into a violent affirmation of the negative principle, 'Never give a damn.'"[14] Yet what one sees is not an exuberant, carefree flapper living for the present, but an unhappy woman living in dread of the future. The alternatives left to Gloria for brightening her future diminish as months and years go by: all notions of motherhood she scornfully rejects as an "indignity" and a threat to her lithe figure,[15] and the prospects she cherishes of becoming a movie star remain largely daydreams.

Gloria is often depicted as the cause of her own troubles, yet she is also portrayed as a victim of fate. The luxurious suburban home that she and Anthony rent, for instance, becomes a sinister place conspiring against her. Gloria's bedroom seems to whisper behind its curtains:

> Ah, my beautiful young lady, yours is not the first daintiness and delicacy that has faded here under the summer suns...generations of unloved women have adorned themselves by that glass for rustic lovers who paid no heed....

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[14] Ibid., p. 168.

[15] On p. 169 of the novel Gloria discovers she is pregnant and, depressed about it, she discusses with Anthony whether or not to have the child. She decides to go off to see a friend, presumably to inquire about an abortion. The pregnancy is not mentioned again in the novel.

> Youth has come into this room in palest blue
> and left it in the grey cerements of despair,
> and through long nights many girls have lain
> awake where that bed stands pouring out waves
> of misery into the darkness.[16]

Although Fitzgerald intends to arouse sympathy for Gloria in lyrical passages like this one, he is not always successful. His earlier descriptions of Gloria's exceptional beauty have been rhapsodic in the extreme, and their message is lost on the reader, who sees more evidence of Gloria's selfishness than her physical loveliness. Because the reader cannot believe in the supernatural beauty that Fitzgerald invests in Gloria, he cannot sympathize with the extent to which Gloria goes to preserve her appearance. His narration occasionally censures her selfish desires, but often, as in the following passage, his tone is more ambivalent: "There was nothing, she had said, that she wanted, except to be young and beautiful for a long time, to be gay and happy, and to have money and love. She wanted what most women want, but she wanted it much more fiercely and passionately."[17]

While Gloria's beauty is gradually deteriorating (and it does so less in her physical reality than in her dread-filled imagination), so is her love for Anthony fading. After only two years of marriage, she alternately hates and tolerates him. He grows increasingly dependent on her personal vitality, considering her as "his sole preoccupation," while she, suffering the flapper's problem of being more

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[16]Fitzgerald, Beautiful, p. 193.

[17]Ibid., p. 226.

attended than attentive, "fundamentally despise/s/ him."[18] As the critic Maxwell Geismar sees her, Gloria is the hard, dominant, almost-masculine partner to the uneasy, passive Anthony.[19]

The last third of the novel continues to trace the harrowing process of decay of these unfortunates and their hapless marriage. Their temporary physical separation, caused by Anthony's wartime military duties, merely reflects the irreparable emotional losses their alliance has suffered. Gloria, prompted by fear and loneliness, experiences a revived sentimental affection for Anthony, but when re-united with him, she painfully recognizes the hollowness of their relationship. Anthony, who has become increasingly muddled and irresponsible during his Army experience, maintains an indifference to Gloria, indeed to life itself. They both suffer from moral inertia: realizing that their love has "turned to dust,"[20] they have the courage neither to rebuild a semblance of contentedness together nor to dissolve their partnership; instead they grimly wait for the results of the newly contested will that, by making them enormously wealthy, will somehow cure all their maladies.

Meanwhile, Gloria continues to face the constant threat of her loss of youth and physical charm. Her mirror remains moderately reassuring for several years, yet her panic and dread of aging's effects

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[18]Ibid., p. 227.

[19]Geismar, p. 300.

[20]Fitzgerald, Beautiful, p. 277.

steadily increase; occasional worry turns to frenzied obsession, so that when she does at last recognize the inevitable wrinkles, Gloria is exceedingly distraught. Not surprisingly, her anxiety is related to her husband's declining appreciation of her loveliness.[21] When Anthony's sullen indifference silences the flattering praise he had formerly lavished on her, she searches for reinforcements outside her marriage, such as the attentions of a former suitor, the movie producer Joseph Bloekman. Gloria, nearing her twenty-ninth birthday, takes a final, deliberate step toward self-fulfillment, yielding to her long-nurtured dream of becoming a film star: she decides to go to Bloekman for a screentest.

What follows, when the director concludes that in the part for which she auditioned, "he needed a younger woman,"[22] is predictably, shattering self-revelation. The humiliation of Bloekman's rejection confirms the awful truth she has dreaded all along, and her tearful grieving reaches a passionate intensity that verges on being embarrassing for the reader. At the last minute Fitzgerald attempts to salvage this scene from total melodrama by a final significant observation: "Then she slid toward the mirror and, as in the test, sprawled downward upon the floor--and lay there sobbing. It was the first awkward movement she had ever made."[23] (Italics mine.) In the

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[21]Her concern is also associated with the admiring attentions of other people. She craves the social success she had enjoyed as a debutante and fears that it is far behind her.

[22]Fitzgerald, Beautiful, p. 327.

[23]Ibid., p. 328.

traumatic realization of her fading beauty and youthfulness she has lost the remaining self-confidence that has supported her so far.

The characterization of Gloria draws to a subdued conclusion after this climax. As she and Anthony endure the last painful weeks of litigation over their inheritance suit, Gloria cultivates a kind of resignation about their condition. There is a touch of stoicism in her continued acceptance of Anthony's increasingly dissolute behavior. "We just go on," she tells a friend.[24] Whereas she had previously existed as a household decoration, now "she was being bent by her environment into a grotesque similitude of a housewife."[25] She was accepting her grim life unquestioningly, if not quite gracefully.

Judy, Nancy and Ailie as "Aging Women"

In this essay's classification of Fitzgerald's flapper heroines, Judy Jones from "Winter Dreams" bridges a gap, standing as both a successful "baby vamp" (a very young flapper) and as an aging flapper past her prime. She was seen earlier in her story as the glittering charmer who dominated the idealistic dreams of Dexter Green for several years. Later she is portrayed as a drab, ordinary housewife and mother, a long-suffering woman of only minimal attractiveness.

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[24] Ibid., p. 333.

[25] Ibid., pp. 343-344.

Several years after Dexter has last seen his dream-girl, he hears of her from a business associate, and learns that Judy has married a shiftless, immature man who "treats her like the devil..., drinks and runs around,"[26] while she dutifully stays home with her children. "When he's particularly outrageous she forgives him," reports Devlin; he calls the twenty-seven-year-old Judy "a little too old" for her husband.[27] Devlin's casual remarks on Judy's loss of beauty are crushing to Dexter: "She was a pretty girl when she first came to Detroit...," he says, and, as he snaps his fingers, he adds, "Lots of women fade just like that."[28] Without realizing the devastating effect of his words on Dexter, he concludes, "Most of the women like her."[29]

The parallels between Gloria and Judy are obvious. Age and circumstance have taken their toll in both appearance and vitality. The exceptional moments of beauty and self-confidence have been followed by dreary routine and common dependence. The Judy who had been searching for something better in life has not found it. In "Winter Dreams," as in so many of Fitzgerald's stories, there is an ominous quality, a lurking sense of tragedy just because the glory of youth is so fleeting. As Frederick Hoffman so accurately states, "In

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[26]Fitzgerald, "...Dreams," Babylon, p. 134.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[29]Ibid., p. 134.

/Fitzgerald's/ world of debutantes and young college men time was always reduced to a pinpoint present, and the task of maturing was a hard one, involving the need to give up that present."[30] Adjusting to maturity was as dismal a procedure for Judy Jones as it had been for Gloria Patch. Other flappers as well would have their difficulties.

The problems of Nancy Lamar, the heroine of "The Jelly-Bean," stem from too vivid an imagination and too little maturity. A kittenish vamp, Nancy is stifled by her sleepy small-town environment and unambitious friends. Like Ardita from "The Offshore Pirate," she is energetic and ambitious, but her goals for the future are romantic and extremely vague: she only knows that she wants to "have style" in her life.[31] In frustration at searching in vain for something she cannot precisely define, she resorts to wild nonconformist behavior as a desperate attention-getter in her hometown. By the time she appears in the story, she has been "flapping" a little too long. As one of her friends says, "She's got scars all over her reputation from one thing or another she's done."[32] While Nancy is a vivacious beauty who looks silky and lustrous in a yellow organdy party dress, she is also a hoyden who swears, drinks corn liquor and shoots crap like a

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[30]Hoffman, Twenties, p. 108.

[31]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Jelly-Bean," Six Tales of the Jazz Age, ed. Frances Fitzgerald Lanahan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 26.

[32]Ibid., p. 23.

professional. That her penchant for recklessness will eventually get her into some kind of trouble seems inevitable.

In Fitzgerald's customary double vision of the flapper, Nancy is presented sympathetically in the story, however, and her charm is seen through the infatuated eyes of Jim Powell, the Jelly-Bean. Jim is a bashful idler-about-town who, in a friendly encounter with Nancy is spurred to a momentary ambition of making something constructive of his life. He is one of the few townspeople who has the opportunity to glimpse the innocent, imaginative aspect of Nancy's personality, to see the sensitive, idealistic girl behind the hard, showy mask.

At the end of "The Jelly-Bean," Nancy has not been able to channel her energies and abilities; she has lost by default her chance to lead the distinctive life she had hoped for. She has let herself become engaged to a wealthy but uninteresting young businessman and now, while drunk, she elopes with him. Her tearful regrets and hurried return to her parents' home are futile. Self-knowledge has come too late to save her from what, the story implies, promises to be a drab future.

Perhaps the most unfortunate of all Fitzgerald's aging flappers is Ailie Calhoun, from "The Last of the Belles." The others decline ignominiously or ungracefully from some youthful summit of beauty or popularity, but she never even reaches such a peak. This story, like "Winter Dreams," takes place over a period of years; it is a description of Ailie and her beaux, and is narrated by Andy, a former boy friend and longtime confidant. Ailie is first seen at age nineteen

as a lovely deb, the belle of a small southern town and its nearby army base. During wartime, Ailie's soldier beaux are many and various. They all admire her beauty and gracious manner and they enjoy her innocent flirtatiousness. Although this young charmer seems to have an "involuntary disastrous effect on men,"[33] she rejects on superficial grounds those who obviously adore her, and she refuses to consider the serious suitors who love with critical discernment. She keeps waiting for a romance with someone whom she ambiguously idealizes as "sincere," and when an ideal candidate appears, she does not recognize him. She takes Lt. Shoen's affection lightly and he, discouraged, soon gives up the chase.

When Andy goes to visit Ailie after having been away several years, he finds her as changed as the town in which she lives. With the post-war dispersal of soldiers and deterioration of the army base that had so dominated Tarleton, the town has returned to its quiet, reflective isolation. Ailie remains, the last of the belles and a final vestige of the traditional South. The young blood that had vitalized the sleepy town had left with the war's end, and Ailie's chance for competing in the busy world of affairs symbolized by the soldiers has been lost. Life has passed her by.

Andy learns that Ailie is now engaged to someone whom Andy considers no more than a steady alternative to a risky last-choice

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[33]F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Last of the Belles," The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 244.

mate or, worse yet, to a life of spinsterhood. At a rowdy party Andy notices that Ailie is "as attractive in her role of reckless clown as she had ever been in her life,"[34] but now she has a different line. She banters on with an excitement that verges on hysteria, and her high-pitched, nervous laughter suggests her insecurity. With emphatic insistence, she tells Andy how much she loves her fiancé, and in her very animation he senses "an admission of defeat."[35]

"You know I couldn't ever marry a Northern man,"[36] she says, as she retreats to her Savannah fiancé, about whom she can afford to have no doubts. Marrying indifferently, she forces herself to cultivate an approximation of love. Ailie's opportunity for "high vanity" has long been lost,[37] at a time she cannot have realized. Even as Fitzgerald shows Ailie as a person somehow courageously adjusting to her fate, he sees her story as unutterably sad.

The "Aging Flapper": From Romance to Realism

Despite the relative youth of such heroines as Gloria Patch, Judy Jones, Nancy Lamar and Ailie Calhoun, their characterizations are a study in the varieties of human decline. Each young woman, for example, faces decay in her own exceptional beauty, and although this loss is sometimes more imagined than real, its psychological

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[34] Ibid., p. 251.

[35] Ibid., p. 252.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Hoffman, Twenties, p. 108.

effects are definite and considerable. Suffering a decline in social popularity is another problem for the girls, since this also is an element of Fitzgerald's "Top Girl."[38] The natural change from single to married status accounts partially for this, yet the fact that the girls continue to desire being adored by many men simultaneously indicates that their marriages have been less than satisfactory.[39]

The losses that Fitzgerald's aging flappers suffer in their beauty and popularity are coupled with a deterioration of perhaps greater significance, the decline in their ambitions of self-fulfillment. The imaginative drive behind Gloria or Judy, once capable of inspiring prodigious aspirations of happiness, has lost its force; the glittering hopes of Nancy to lead a stylish life and of Ailie to find a "sincere" man, have turned to frustration, energies are vitiated and dreams unrealized. The natural vitality of these girls, such an important aspect of their total charm, either quickens to strained excitation or withers to sullen resignation. Fitzgerald emphasizes the growing indifference of these women to their futures and he dramatizes the uncomfortable adjustments they must make to their now colorless, inauspicious lives.

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[38]Even Ailie enjoys a considerable heyday of popularity, and if her social success does not reach the sublime climax that the others enjoy, at least it lasts longer.

[39]This is, of course, stated only in Gloria's case. It may be considered as implied in Judy's and Nancy's situations, however.

All these heroines and their stories relate to the author's life and they reflect some of his personal doubts about women's capability to age serenely. The comment he made to his daughter about most American women over thirty, that their faces were "relief maps of petulant and bewildered unhappiness,"[40] he might have made in the twenties about twenty-five-year-old flappers. For even at the height of his youth and early fame he feared the process of deterioration in women, particularly in his beautiful, energetic wife. As Turnbull has suggested, "So much of what Scott loved in Zelda depended on verve."[41] That Zelda's health and spirit should have broken within ten years of their marriage adds poignant sadness to the prophetic anxieties reflected in Fitzgerald's stories and his novel, The Beautiful and Damned.

It is difficult to search for intimate, detailed relationships between the aging heroines in Fitzgerald's early fiction and the woman so dominant in his life at the time of writing, for too close an inspection often seems to cloud rather than clarify the distinctions between life and art. As Charles Shain has stated, "We shall probably never find it easy to distinguish between the historical person and Scott Fitzgerald's Zelda."[42] There can be no doubt,

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[40]Fitzgerald to Frances Scott Fitzgerald, October 5, 1940, Letters, p. 96.

[41]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 131.

[42]Shain, p. 16.

however, but that the novelist wrote out of her experience as well as his; "he transmuted their twin biographies into fiction."[43]

As Fitzgerald understood and projected his own experience into his writing in capturing the moment of groping adolescence as in "Bernice Bobs her Hair," and the peak of romantic youth as in Rosalind in This Side of Paradise, so he also acutely sensed the sometimes crushing reality of maturity as his flappers moved into adulthood. Fitzgerald poured the experiences of his courtship and early married life into the imaginative cauldron of his mind, where he re-lived and contemplated them, fashioning from them various heroines of often painfully realistic proportions. The same romantic sensibility that enhanced for Fitzgerald the glamor of Zelda, his fiancé then bride, was used to describe the early radiance of Gloria, Judy, Nancy and Ailie; the same conviction regarding women's frailty in adjusting to the modern world--and the compassionate vision to see such a handicap as tragic--that motivated the author to create flapper heroines in unfortunate circumstances, eventually watched in loving despair the decline of the once beautiful, once ambitious Zelda.

The "Aging Woman": Relationship to Flapper

Fitzgerald's older flapper heroines complement his young ones, and in many respects they also share the same similarities and differences with the flappers depicted in popular journals of the twenties. Like Rosalind and Ardita, Gloria and Nancy manifest some

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[43] Ibid.

of the characteristics of Duncan Aikman's "Amazons of Freedom" in their nonconformist manner and enthusiasm for recklessness. And Ailie's appearance and romantic experience, no less than Isabelle's, are described in a way substantially different from magazine accounts of flappers' dress and behavior.

However, Fitzgerald's older flappers stand in another relationship with their factual, social history counterparts: they are more realistic than the novelist's portraits of young girls, and thus they conform more closely to the raucous ideal of the real-life flapper. Nancy and Ailie are similar to the actual young people who, according to contemporary magazine reports, were enjoying a long post-war spree, a vacation from routine and responsibility. Gloria, basing her hedonistic pursuit of pleasure on the pretext that life is meaningless no matter how it is lived, is related to the young people who worried A. Maude Royden because they were destroying old beliefs without providing constructive replacements. Gloria, Judy, Nancy and Ailie have too many problems to be seen by Fitzgerald in the same idealistic light as were his younger flappers.

The change in Fitzgerald's apparent attitude toward girls of the twenties era seems to have resulted from his increased contact with young people more extreme in behavior and philosophy than those he had known during his school and college days. Living in the midst of New York City's Jazz Age excesses, he may have encountered young women who transgressed the bounds of his sense of morality and propriety, and perhaps unconsciously, he incorporated their traits into

his characterizations of older flappers. Just as The Beautiful and Damned was "a repudiation of the Younger Generation thesis that had brought /Fitzgerald/ to power,"[44] so Gloria was a rejection of the image of modern American womanhood that he himself, in the glamorous portraits in This Side of Paradise, had promoted. Frederick Hoffman suggests that Fitzgerald had earlier been the leading spokesman of his generation, but that he quickly "became its most perceptive and incisive judge."[45] It might be further suggested that in the reckless, self-indulgent behavior of Judy, Nancy and Ailie, Fitzgerald saw their corresponding misery and defeat. His increasingly realistic heroines portrayed the casualties of his generation.

Ultimately, it is Fitzgerald's compassionate view that gives his characterizations distinction. His aging flappers are portrayed with understanding and sympathy, although not without some critical qualification. While he could not condone the selfish dedication of Gloria or Judy to superficial goals, he depicts them as being pitiful in their defeated state. Though he could not approve the wild antics of Nancy or the careless attitudes of Ailie, he elicits sympathy for them by seeing their problems as part of the dying world of the Old South. Writing later in his life in The Crack-Up, Fitzgerald admitted that the stories that came to him in the early twenties had

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[44]Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald, p. 131.

[45]Hoffman, Twenties, p. 118.

"a touch of disaster in them,"[46] and that their heroines had a tragic potentiality about them. Nowhere is this as evident as in these works depicting aging flappers, girls who sense their decline in charm and beauty. The novelist attempts in many of these characterizations to add a tragic quality to his heroines. Although he does not create genuine tragic figures, he does succeed in drawing extraordinarily sensitive portraits which embody certain tragic characteristics. Fitzgerald, caught in the contradictions of his own belief in idealism and realism, produced heroines similarly influenced, earlier by one force, and later by the other. In the montage of this fantasy and reality, with Fitzgerald's predisposition to create complex human characters, lies the distinctive quality of his flapper.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the image of the flapper which Fitzgerald reveals in his early writings in its conformity to the popular image of the flapper in America during the 1920's. In doing this, the present writer has attempted (a) to analyze the popular concept of the flapper as it is described in the large circulation periodicals and contemporary histories; (b) to consider the actual girls in Fitzgerald's adolescent life as they relate to his fictional heroines; and (c) to define Fitzgerald's concept of the flapper as it is exemplified in the young heroines of his early novels and short stories. The conclusions of the writer's findings are summarized as follows.

The flapper, as commonly depicted in the popular journals of the 1920's, was viewed in various ways: as glamorous and sensual, as the rightful heiress to America's liberal tradition, as an immodest disgrace to womanhood. More often than not, the flapper was viewed unfavorably, since she seemed to threaten the moral and social status quo in American middle-class life.

Fitzgerald's adolescent and young adult years were a mixture of ecstacy and heartache, idealistic dreams and harsh realities, exuberant self-confidence and painful insecurity. Ginevra King and Zelda Sayre, as well as the other people and experiences meaningful in Fitzgerald's early life, inspired his creative sensibilities and were, in

turn, transmuted by his poetic genius into remarkable fictional creations.

Fitzgerald's image of the flapper, as reflected in his early short stories and his first two novels, This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned, is a composite of the "top girl" and the "aging woman." His younger flappers, such as Rosalind Connage, are depicted as about nineteen years old, and riding on the crest of their first social success. In addition to being popular, they are invariably beautiful and wealthy. Although his young heroines are portrayed with specific realistic traits, they are represented, more importantly, as being the ideal fulfillment of a golden world of fantasy. These flappers do not ultimately conform to the flappers popularly conceived in the 1920's, since they are more illusive, romantic and ethereal than their social history counterparts.

Fitzgerald's "aging woman" flappers, such as Gloria Patch, are, at about age twenty-four or so, facing the prospects of growing "old." They are threatened with a decline in their beauty, charm and popularity. Having enjoyed a period of spectacular personal success and happiness, they now confront complex emotional adjustments. The idealistic bubble of their youthful optimism has been burst by the painful cruelties of the real world. These flappers, less etherealized and romanticized than the "top girls," thus conform more closely to the popular image of the flapper.

Fitzgerald's views of young women are, to some considerable

extent, influenced by the girls he knew and with whom he had significant relationships. In his own experience as well as in his fiction, there is a movement from innocence and buoyant optimism toward knowledge and melancholic skepticism. Fitzgerald's early female characters differ substantially from his later ones, but both types of portraits reflect the distinctive dimension of his poetic imagination.

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